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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHJA/ISLAMIC CONFERENCE COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4307
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1161
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0785
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1748
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JAKARTA 002556

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, INR/EAP(ZENZIE), DRL
NSC FOR EPHU

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SUBJECT: INDONESIA'S SHIAS: A SMALL COMMUNITY UNDER SOME
PRESSURE

REF: JAKARTA 001919

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Indonesia's low-profile Shia community is believed to be growing, but it is a very small minority in this Sunni-dominated country. Leaders of the only national Shia organization say many Shias hide their faith to avoid discrimination. Violence targeting Shias is rare, but there have been two incidents reported this year. The broader Shia community is divided: the vast majority support Indonesian nationalism, but a much smaller "Qum" group is pro-Iranian and radical. Over all, Shias are a very small group with very limited influence on Indonesian policy related to Iran and its nuclear program. (Septel reviews Indonesian-Iranian relations.) End Summary.

A Small Minority

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¶2. (SBU) Shia Islam has grown in relative terms in Indonesia since the Iranian Revolution, mostly via conversions (see below). It is impossible to definitively assess how many Shias there are because some apparently practice "Taqiyya," a Shia tactic of concealing their faith to avoid discrimination. Contacts agree, however, that there are several million of them in this Sunni-dominated country of over 200 million Muslims. Current Shia activity is centered in Jakarta, Bandung (West Java), and Makassar (South Sulawesi), with smaller groups in East Java, West Sumatra, and Aceh. Jakarta is also home to the Iran-linked Islamic Cultural Center (ICC) and a half-dozen well-known Shia foundations.

Shias United

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¶3. (C) The Shia community's national organization is the All Indonesian Assembly of Alhulbayt Associations (IJABI), which is led by Jalaluddin Rahmat, Indonesia's most prominent Shia. (Note: See para 10 for bio details. Also see reftel.) IJABI has been recognized by the Indonesian government as a foundation since 2000. Claiming 2.5 million members, IJABI expressly rejects a political role and says it seeks to end any and all sectarian violence in Indonesia. Rahmat and his California Berkeley-educated deputy, Emilia Renita Az,

estimate there are about five million Shia in Indonesia. While declining to provide names, Rahmat and Az claimed that many Indonesian politicians and intellectuals are secretly Shia, including one high-ranking figure serving in the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI).

¶4. (SBU) IJABI has offices in 25 of Indonesia's 33 provinces and runs 16 schools, including the highly-acclaimed Mutahari high-school in Jakarta. These schools offer free tuition and cater to Sunni as well as Shia children. The organization, through its links to Rahmat and his Jalal Center for the Enlightenment>Q|Q02QzBtion to having good relations with mainstream mass-Muslim groups like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, she and Rahmat also engage hard-liners such as the thuggish Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). Rahmat called FPI and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) co-founder Abu Bakar Bashir "terrorists." She volunteered that an Iran-trained Indonesian Shia, Syaid Hussain Al Habsyi, was arrested in the early 1980s for links to Bashir and Abdullah Sungkar, another JI figure. Notably, the Iran-linked ICC's web site includes an interview with FPI leader Habib Riziq Shihab in which he speaks glowingly of his Shia friends.

Sunni-Shia tension
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¶6. (C) IJABI leaders say that violence against Shias was unheard of until this year. On January 5, an IJABI branch in

JAKARTA 00002556 002 OF 003

Bondowoso, East Java, came under attack from a conservative group of NU members egged on by the local chairman of the Islamic Clerics Council (MUI) and a visiting Saudi cleric, according to Az. Four of the attackers were arrested, and within a few months had been tried and convicted. Nevertheless, in April 2007, police in Madura, East Java, were forced to intervene to prevent an armed mob from ransacking the home of a Shia cleric. A few days later, thousands of protesters in Bangil, East Java, demanded a ban on Shia organizations, leading NU Chairman Hasyim Muzadi to call upon Shia to avoid public statements that could upset NU members.

¶7. (C) While violence against Shia is apparently a new development, IJABI leaders say that discrimination is common and is the primary reason many Shia keep their beliefs to themselves. (Note: The national MUI in 1984 issued a fatwa warning Sunni adherents about Shia inroads.) Az claimed that it was commonly feared that if their religious beliefs were known, Shia would not receive promotions or be fired from their positions, especially in more conservative Sunni districts.

The Shia and NU
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¶8. (C) Contacts assert that Shias are successfully converting new members, a claim which is difficult to confirm. The NU appears to be the mass-Muslim group whose members are most susceptible to Shia inroads, though Az claims that most recent converts are from Muhammadiyah. NU has long incorporated many Shia traditions and its kyais (clerics) hold leadership roles similar to Shia imams. Rahmat noted that currently there are 200 NU students studying in Iran and that most of the prominent pro-Shia ulamas in Indonesia are associated with NU, including Said Agil Siradj. Nasruddin Umar, the Director General of Islamic Community Guidance at the Ministry of Religion (himself a high-ranking NU official), termed Shia "a threat" to NU in a conversation with poloff in August.

The "Qum" group
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¶9. (C) IJABI paints itself as firmly Indonesian and committed to democracy, in contrast to what it claims is a

smaller group of Shia more directly influenced by their leaders' experiences in Iran and which supports a transnational theocracy. This "Qum" group, unlike IJABI, views Ayatollah Khomani as a political leader, not just a spiritual leader. (Note: In 1982, ten Indonesians were selected to study in Qum, Iran; by 1990 over 50 Indonesians had graduated from Qum schools; and in 2004 alone, 90 Indonesians were sent to Qum. Nearly all studied at Madrasa Hujjatiyya or, more recently, Madrasa Imam Khomeini.) IJABI did not provide many details on the "Qum" group. Though Rahmat tried to blame this Qum group, about which little is known, for Y_WnyeQQQQQ2\3Q!QcQ[rQecision-making regarding Iran does not appear to have been heavily impacted by its domestic Shia constituents.

Bio-note

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110. (SBU) Jalaluddin Rahmat: Born in Bandung (1949) to an NU family, but later joined Muhammadiyah -- attended a variety of pesantren in West Java, eventually attending a high school associated with Persatuan Islam (PERSIS) -- undergraduate degree in Communication from Padjajaran University in Bandung -- M.A. from Iowa State University on a Fulbright (1981) -- ran into trouble with the Indonesian military and local branch of MUI in 1985 and left Indonesia to pursue his studies in Qum -- found his way to Australia where he received his Phd. from Australian National University -- in 2003, helped found the Islamic College for Advanced Studies at Paramadina University, where he still

JAKARTA 00002556 003 OF 003

teaches -- has authored over 45 books on Islam, communications, and philosophy -- married to Euis Kartini -- speaks Dutch and Arabic in addition to near fluent English.

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